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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [MCAP](#) [UNAU](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: UNIFIL COMMANDER ON SEPTEMBER 11 ROCKET ATTACK
FROM LEBANON

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Forces from the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), cooperating with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), responded quickly by increasing patrols following the launch of rockets from Lebanon into Israel on September 11, according to UNIFIL Commander Gen. Claudio Graziano. Graziano confirmed that a suspected Al-Qaeda splinter group called Ziad Al-Jarrah (ZAJ) had claimed responsibility for the missile launch. Graziano mentioned that the UNIFIL report on the July 14 explosion of a Hizballah arms depot in Kherbit Selim would not be released to the UN Security Council but would be passed to Lebanese and Israeli participants in the Tripartite talks, as well as the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations. Graziano opined that the renewed one-year UNIFIL mandate comes under a "new strategic environment," which encourages enhanced UNIFIL and LAF cooperation. End summary.

QUICK REACTION TO 9/11 ROCKET LAUNCHES

¶2. (C) In a September 14 regularly scheduled meeting with ambassadors from troop-contributing countries -- coincidentally three days after the launch of two Katyusha rockets into Israel from southern Lebanon -- Graziano reported that UNIFIL had received advance warning from Israeli Defense Force (IDF) sources of a possible launch. Graziano emphasized that UNIFIL, cooperating with the LAF, responded quickly following the launch with increased patrols in its area of operations (AO). Israel retaliated quickly by firing twelve rounds of 155mm artillery into an open field near the launch site, located several kilometers from UNIFIL's Naqoura headquarters. Graziano, who underscored the difficulty of catching culprits or finding launch pads in the jungle-like banana fields that cover wide swaths of UNIFIL's coastal AO, lamented that even unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are not effective in preventing or disrupting the launch of small missiles from quickly erected launchers. Moreover, if UNIFIL forces move quickly to a suspected launch site, they could be vulnerable to IDF retaliatory fire.

¶3. (C) Graziano confirmed that a suspected Al-Qaeda splinter group calling itself Ziad Al-Jarrah, whose members are believed to be using the Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp near Tyre as a safehaven, had claimed responsibility for the missile launch. The timing of the launches at 1545 local time on September 11 (1245 GMT), he noted, suggested to some that the rockets were launched to coincide with the first plane hitting the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. Noting the recent LAF-led arrest of five Palestinians for threats against UNIFIL forces, Graziano warned UNIFIL is "optimistic but vigilant" that the

launchings will not devolve into something worse. Senior UNIFIL political adviser Milos Strugar revealed that ZAJ is also suspected of the February launch of rockets into Israel.

On September 11, caretaker Prime Minister Fouad Siniora condemned the attacks from Lebanese territory and the Israeli retaliation and affirmed the Lebanese government's commitment to UNSCR 1701.

KHERBIT SELIM REPORT TO TRIPARTITE ONLY

¶4. (C) Turning to UNIFIL's official report on the July 14 Kherbit Selim arms cache explosion and its aftermath, Graziano remarked unequivocally that the building was "actively maintained" by Hizballah. Even though no evidence was found of any fatalities, he acknowledged Hizballah had indeed removed some of the unexploded ordnance and taken it to an unidentified location. Graziano mentioned that the report would not be publicized in the UN Security Council but would be released to Lebanese and Israeli participants in the Tripartite talks, as well as the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO).

NEW MANDATE WON'T ALTER POSTURE

¶5. (C) Graziano opined that the renewed one-year UNIFIL mandate (UNSCR 1884) came in a "new strategic environment" that encourages enhanced UNIFIL and LAF cooperation, but the mandate would not alter UNIFIL's current posture. Graziano also lamented the lack of progress on Israeli withdrawal from

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northern Ghajar, which he described as a "clear violation" of UNSCR 1701. On a positive note, Graziano stated that the LAF would join UNIFIL at two of five new checkpoints around Ghajar intended to combat drug smuggling. The joint checkpoints are a step toward addressing the expected goal of the upcoming UN-sponsored review of UNIFIL's mission, Graziano explained, which will assess the "long-term objective of gradually transferring UNIFIL's current responsibilities to the LAF."

UNIFIL POPULARITY UP

¶6. (C) Local residents' satisfaction with UNIFIL has risen to 75%, based on a survey taken in April 2009. The survey, which was funded by the U.K. Conflict Prevention Fund and the Norwegian MFA, began in April 2007 and canvassed 1100 citizens in UNIFIL's AO. UNIFIL poloff Lillah Fearnley noted that a higher number of participants considered the LAF the "main security provider" in the south and positively viewed UNIFIL's impact in improving the local economy and decreasing tensions.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The September 12 rocket attack was the third such incident in nine months. Our UNIFIL interlocutors were confident that the Israeli retaliation would be proportionate as long as there were no casualties. The September 12 artillery barrage marked the IDF's strongest response to the three attacks, though it was deliberately aimed at an unpopulated area near the rocket launch-site. Although UNIFIL assesses that Ziad al-Jarrah is a minor group, its suspected presence in Ain al-Hilweh is another factor complicating an already fraught counter-terrorism environment. SISON